

Making a Shift From Conventional to Regenerative Agriculture With the Rainforest Alliance

Markets Innovation



MAKING A SHIFT FROM CONVENTIONAL TO REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE WITH THE RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

In the face of climate change and the spiraling biodiversity crisis, farmers, governments, NGOs, and companies alike are increasingly exploring pathways to not only mitigate the harmful environmental impacts of conventional agriculture, but also go much further: to embrace practices that can actually improve the health of the Earth.

Enter [regenerative agriculture](#), a conservation and rehabilitation approach with the potential to increase biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services (including carbon sequestration, which is vital for climate adaptation and mitigation), nurture agroecosystem resilience, and promote thriving rural economies for farming communities around the world.

THE CHALLENGE

Intense land use and conversion pursued under conventional agriculture accounts for [24 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions](#), making the shift to regener-

ative farming critical for emissions reduction and climate change mitigation. But for many companies, making this transition is not an easy one; it requires scientific expertise, direct engagement with suppliers to identify their needs, and utilizing tools and resources that are often beyond a company's existing capacity. Fortunately, the Rainforest Alliance has more than 30 years of experience in implementing holistic ecosystem management across 70 countries. Our expert teams are equipped and ready to help your company identify where and how to get started.

OUR SOLUTIONS

The Rainforest Alliance leverages its scientific expertise and field-based network to promote regenerative practices through three strategic pathways:

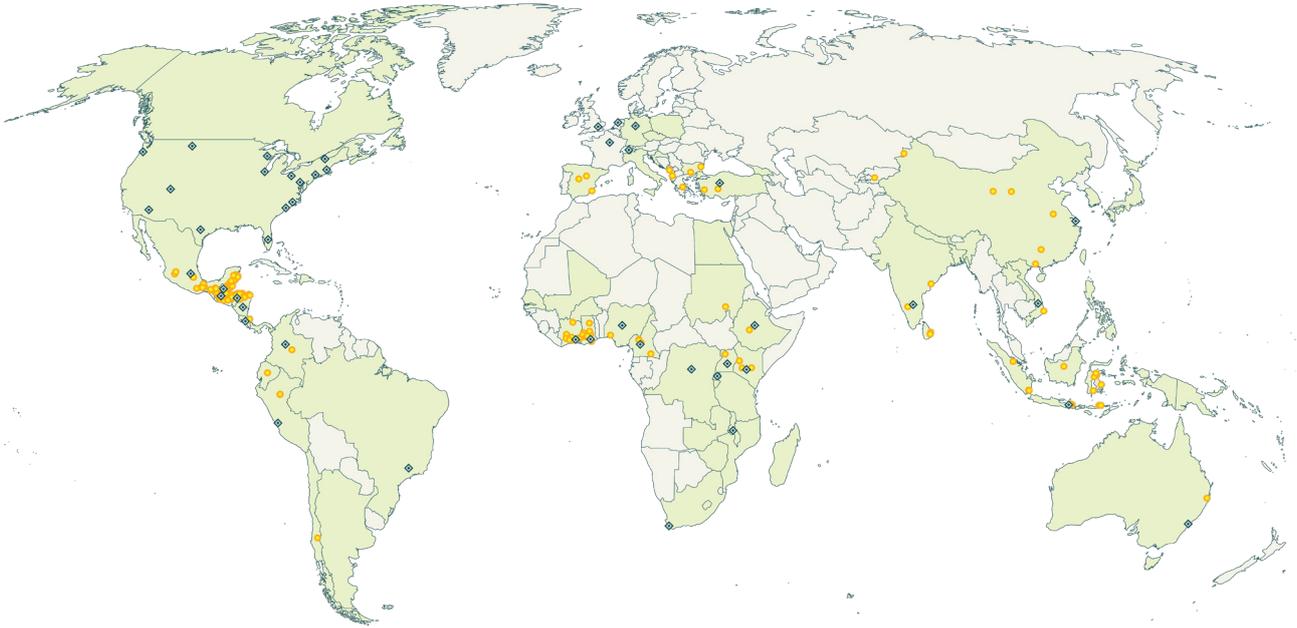
- Rainforest Alliance Certification
- Tailored Supply Chain Services
- Landscapes and Communities

Each pathway is guided by our unique and robust [strategy](#) for promoting regenerative practices, developed by our internal experts and with external consultation. We also tailor these strategies to meet sector, regional, and local needs.

FIGURE 1

Our global reach. The Rainforest Alliance supports farmers transition to climate-smart, regenerative agriculture across key sourcing regions.

○ countries with Rainforest Alliance Certified farms ● Rainforest Alliance project sites ◆ staff (offices and remote)



Our six key commodities:



At the Rainforest Alliance, regenerative agriculture comprises a broad set of principles and practices under the umbrella of [climate-smart agriculture](#); in order to reach a point where farms are truly regenerative, it is first necessary to address the specific climate threats—whether they be flooding, droughts, or rising temperatures—for a given region, crop, or even farm. Our approach to regenerative agriculture is outlined in the farming and environmental chapters of our [2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard](#), where we focus on promoting conservation agriculture,

agroforestry, biodiversity and natural vegetation conservation, waste and water management, and low-input agriculture across production levels, from the individual plot to the wider landscape.

Companies can elect to pursue one, multiple, or all our pathways. The Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard promotes regenerative best practices, making certification an excellent starting place for many of our partners.



Coffee plants in a nursery



Tea farmers use compost as fertilizer on this Rainforest Alliance Certified farm

RAINFOREST ALLIANCE CERTIFICATION

For many companies, the first obstacle in making the regenerative shift is identifying the practices and strategies they need to promote within their supply chains. The Rainforest Alliance Standard is strongly aligned with regenerative principles and promotes best practices, making the transition easier. These standards include, but are not limited to:

- **Soil health:** The foundation of a regenerative farm is healthy soil. Rainforest Alliance Certified farms are required to conduct soil testing and analysis to guide their inputs. Our Sustainable Agriculture Standard also promotes the use of organic fertilizers, composting, crop rotation, integrated weed management, and cover cropping, among other practices that improve soil health.
- **Promoting biodiversity conservation:** A flourishing ecosystem is a diverse ecosystem. Rainforest Alliance Certified farms promote biodiversity through the maintenance of native and diverse vegetation, implementation of agroforestry practices, protection of high conservation value areas (HCVA), and development of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies.
- **Improved livelihoods:** Regenerative agriculture looks at the wellbeing of the entire farm's ecosystem, including the people who live and work there. Our Sustainable Agriculture Standard outlines critical protections for farmers and workers, activities aimed at improving the livelihoods and conditions of farming communities, and measures for compensating farmers for their positive contribution to nature.
- **Climate change adaptation and mitigation:** Restoring forests, enhancing biodiversity, and reducing on-farm greenhouse gas emissions through nature-based techniques makes farms not only more resilient to climate change, but a key tool in the fight against it. By implementing practices that protect and support a thriving ecosystem, certified farmers are also strengthening their local ecosystem services, such as flood resistance and carbon sequestration.

These are just a few of the regenerative principles and practices that Rainforest Alliance certification promotes. Other regenerative principles that certification is aligned with, such as water protection and climate adaptation, are further detailed within our [position paper](#), "Raising the Bar—Regenerative Agriculture for More Resilient Agro-Ecosystems"

Certification is a good starting place and evidence shows that it yields results: Studies in Latin America and Africa show that Rainforest Alliance Certified farms exhibit greater [soil health](#), lower rates of [deforestation](#), and better [financial wellbeing](#) than non-certified farms. Many of our partners then seek to expand on the regenerative benefits of certification and are actively exploring interventions and technologies with our [Tailored Supply Chain Services](#) team.

TAILORED SUPPLY CHAIN SERVICES

Whether your company is just starting to explore a regenerative pathway, or is looking to improve its ongoing interventions, our Regenerative Agriculture Program can amplify your impact beyond certification. From desk-based research to field-level partnerships, our team can:

- **Map your regenerative journey with our [Advisory Services](#).** Using the Rainforest Alliance regenerative agriculture scorecard, our team identifies both where producers within your supply chain are in the transition towards regenerative agriculture and the actions needed to help them advance towards your regenerative goals.
- **Co-develop and facilitate interventions through [Field-Based Partnerships \(FBP\)](#).** The FBP team facilitates the identification and implementation of interventions that drive continuous improvement and bring you closer to your responsible sourcing goals.
- **Track your progress through [Supply Chain Monitoring and Evaluations \(M&E\)](#).** Our M&E team tracks your activities to understand what interventions are working and where additional assistance is needed.
- **Communicate progress**, internally and externally. The Rainforest Alliance seal signals your commitment to sustainable agriculture. Our team can help amplify that message through guided communications and story telling support.

One recent accomplishment of the Rainforest Alliance Tailored Supply Chain Services team is the creation of a [regenerative coffee scorecard](#). The scorecard builds upon insights gathered from research conducted on smallholder coffee farms in 2020 where the scorecard was initially piloted. The aim of the scorecard is to provide our partners with a tool that can be utilized to assess the progress of regenerative practices on smallholder coffee farms, based on the context of the region. The results of the scorecard can help identify where farms are performing well, and where additional support is needed to invest in continuous improvements.

For now, the scorecard is focused on assessing coffee farms, but the Rainforest Alliance is also partnering with supply chain actors to design and pilot regenerative agriculture activities in our other priority sectors. The more we learn from these pilots, the more we can expand the scope of the scorecard and our regenerative services.

LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES

The Rainforest Alliance recognizes that addressing the barriers to regenerative agriculture often requires going beyond the level of the individual farm and forest patch. Our Landscapes Management pathway expands the focus of an intervention from a single production unit within a company's supply chain to a wider geographical area that encompasses farmers, companies, communities, local governments, and NGOs. It brings all land users together to discuss common interests and determine collective actions.

In partnership with institutional stakeholders such as US-AID, the IKEA foundation, the United Nations' Global Environment Facility, the Green Climate Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank, the Rainforest Alliance is implementing landscapes projects across key sourcing regions. Many of our corporate partners are also engaged in landscapes projects, such as those included in our [Integrated Landscape Management Program](#).

Some of Our Regenerative Projects Include:

[GHANA'S SUI RIVER LANDSCAPE](#)

The Sui River landscape in Ghana is home to a thriving cocoa and timber industry. Through our partnership with **Olam International** and the **UK Partnerships for Forests**, the Rainforest Alliance assists **10,000 farmers** in pursuing climate-smart and regenerative practices. This is achieved by:

- Training farmers in climate resilient farming techniques
- Olam providing interest-free loans and technical support
- Distributing shade tree and timber tree plantlets to support crop health and reforestation



Auditors in a forest clearing

[PERU'S COCOA AND COFFEE COMMUNITIES IN SAN MARTÍN AND CAJAMARCA](#)

With support from partners like the **Alstom Foundation**, **IKI**, and **Telos Impact**, the Rainforest Alliance works with farmers and Indigenous communities throughout Peru. As of 2020, thanks to our partners' support, we provided **3,000** coffee farmers and **4,000** cocoa farmers in San Martín and Cajamarca with trainings in climate-smart and regenerative farming practices. The Rainforest Alliance offers farmers:

- Technical training on regenerative practices and business management
- Connection to buyers and financial support
- Coalition support with local governments
- Crop diversification assistance



*A shade coffee farm in Peru
Photo: David Dudenhoefer*

WORK WITH US

Making the transition towards regenerative farming is no easy task. It takes teamwork and collaboration, and the Rainforest Alliance offers a global network of experts ready to help you make the shift within your supply chain and in the regions you source from.

Interested in learning more?

Contact us at TailoredServices@ra.org 



The Rainforest Alliance is creating a more sustainable world by using social and market forces to protect nature and improve the lives of farmers and forest communities.

rainforest-alliance.org

email: TailoredServices@ra.org

